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TAGS: KPAO PGOV PREL TW

SUBJECT: KMT SPOKESWOMAN OUTLINES PARTY'S PRE AND POST ELECTION STRATEGY

Classified By: DIR Douglas H. Paal, Reason 1.4(D)

¶1. (SBU) AIT's Public Affairs Section (PAS) is looking at media strategies and public platforms of Taiwan's main political parties in the run-up to the December 3 elections. This is the first in a series and will be followed by a snapshot of the DPP. During a November 18 meeting with AIT at opposition Kuomintang (KMT) headquarters, KMT Spokeswoman Cheng Liwun described the party line regarding the December 3 elections, post-election strategy, and media relations. Cheng explained that the KMT will focus on party reform after the elections, and she was unable to clarify the party's stance on U.S. arms procurement.

Election Focal Points

¶2. (SBU) Regarding the upcoming December 3 local elections, Cheng stated that the KMT is particularly focused on Taipei County, Ilan County, and Chiayi City, the latter two because the KMT has a real chance of winning these pan-green strongholds for the first time. The KMT is also looking closely at Yunlin, Nantou, Changhua, and Pingtung Counties, all very close races which the KMT has a good chance of winning.

¶3. (SBU) On election strategy, Cheng stressed the importance of grassroots activities, noting how the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) had come to power largely on the strength of its grassroots support whereas the KMT has ignored and, consequently, lost much of its grassroots support in recent years.

Post-Election Priorities for the KMT

¶4. (SBU) Cheng emphasized that after the December 3 elections, KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou must deliver on his campaign promise of party reform, including tackling the issue of excess KMT property and buildings. He will also try to recruit younger members to the party in an effort to create a new image for the KMT.

No Policy on Arms Procurement

¶5. (SBU) Cheng became visibly uncomfortable when asked about the KMT's stance and post-election strategy on U.S. arms procurement. She stated that the KMT is still looking into the issue and has its own internal policymaking procedures, and she was unable to further clarify the KMT's policy on this issue.

Taiwan Media: Scandals, No Policy Debate

¶6. (SBU) Cheng criticized the Taiwan media for its lack of professionalism and focus on scandals rather than real policy debate. According to Cheng, most Taiwan media outlets are owned by businessmen, so ratings take precedence over good journalism. Lack of adequate training for journalists compounds this problem. Furthermore, she noted that the media has to look for financial support from the government and, thus, cannot criticize the ruling government too openly. Cheng expressed high hopes that the newly created National Communications Commission (NCC) will help the Taiwan media gain greater independence from government interference.

¶7. (SBU) Cheng stated that since the Taiwan public is more interested in scandals, KMT policy briefings enjoy little, if any, media coverage. She claimed that the "DPP is only interested in scandals" and wants to avoid a serious policy debate with the KMT.

Ma the KMT Mouthpiece

¶8. (SBU) Because it is so difficult to get the KMT message out to the public, Cheng stated that Chairman Ma is instrumental in this regard since people actually want to

listen to him. The KMT has been and will continue to use Ma as the party mouthpiece. Cheng denied rumors of divisions within the KMT, asserting that the KMT only has a single, unified message coordinated within the party. She affirmed that Ma has a central role in devising the KMT's public message.

"Must Read" Papers, "Must Watch" TV

19. (SBU) Cheng maintained that there is no single newspaper or TV station that represents KMT views. However, when pressed, she stated that the "must read" Chinese language newspapers are the centrist China Times (circulation: 700,000) and conservative United Daily News (circulation: 650,000). (Note: The Central Daily News is considered to be a mouthpiece of the KMT, but it has a very limited circulation of about 80,000. End Note). She also said that TVBS is a "must watch" TV station.

110. (C) Comment: Cheng Liwun was a DPP member for over a decade before being drummed out for criticizing a fellow DPP member. Chosen in January to be KMT spokeswoman, she was clearly recruited because she represents the "new generation" of the KMT: young, energetic, attractive, outspoken and interested in the grassroots. She still clearly carries strong animosity toward the DPP. End Comment.

Paal